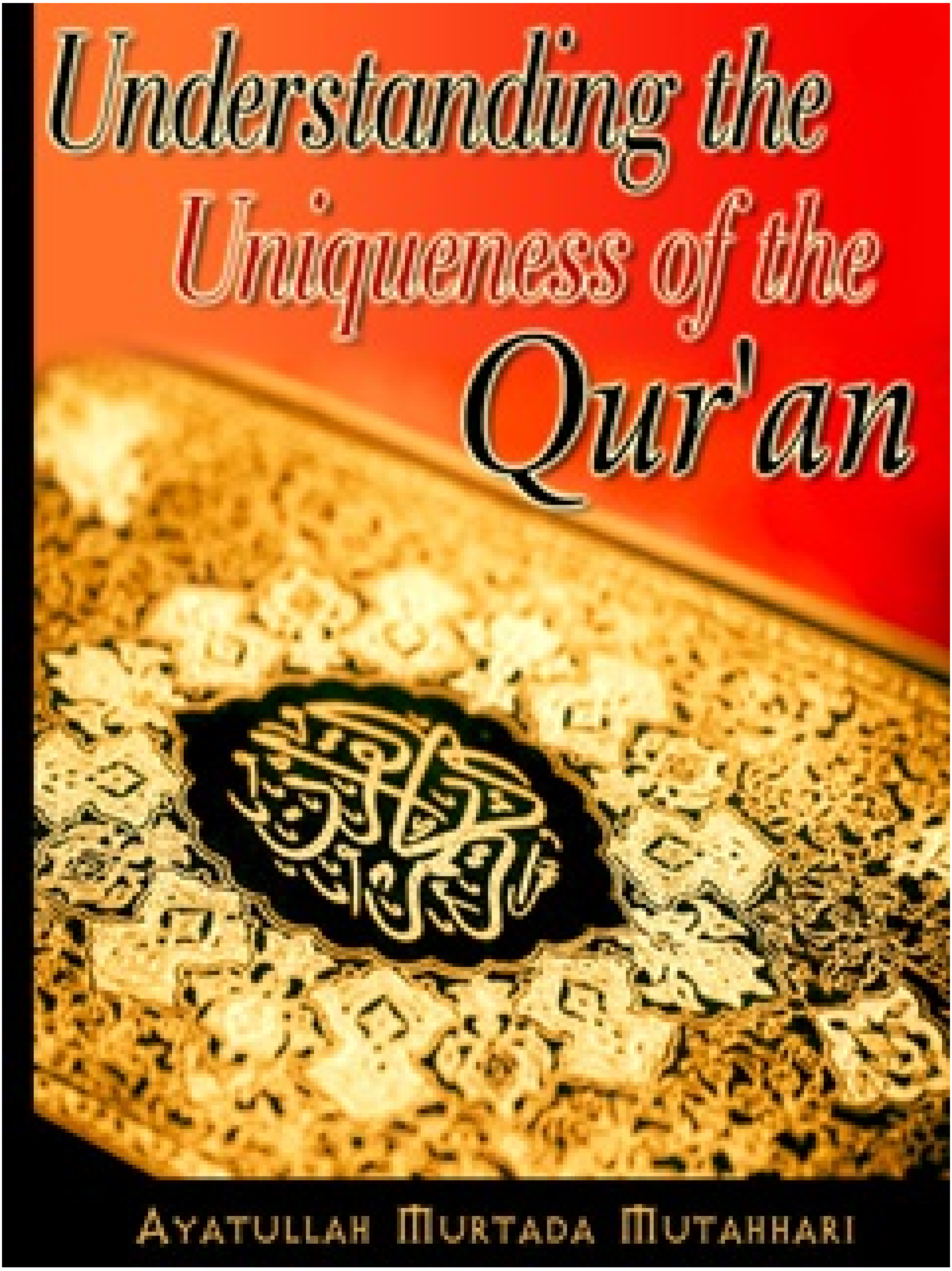

Understanding the
Uniqueness of the
Qur'an
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Introduction

The study and knowledge of the Qur'an is essential for every learned person as well as for all faithful believers. It is specially essential for those scholars who are interested in the study of man and society, since this book has been effectively instrumental not only in moulding the destinies of Islamic societies, but also in shaping the destiny of the human race as a whole.

A brief glance over history would be enough to provide sufficient proof of the claim that there has been no such book that has ever influenced human societies to the magnitude of the Qur'an. It is for the same reason that the Qur'an automatically steps into the precincts of sociological discussions, and becomes the elemental constituent of the subjects of research in this discipline. This means that any deep study and

profound research in the field of world history of the last fourteen hundred years, is .impossible without the knowledge of the Qur'an

The study of the Qur'an is essential for every committed Muslim, since it is the main source and foundation of the religious thought and faith. Whatsoever gives meaning, essence and sanctity to his existence lies in the

.Holy Qur'an

The Qur'an is not just like other religious books which are content to discuss the problems of existence of God and creation in cryptic tones, or like those which merely convey a series of simple moral advice and counsels, so that those who believe in them are hopelessly left to search for guidance in other sources. Unlike such books the Qur'an formulates the tenets of faith besides communicating the ideas and views .that are essential for a man of faith and belief

Similarly, it also lays down the principles of moral and ethical values for the purpose of social and familial existence. It leaves the job of explanation, interpretation, and occasionally that of ijtihad and application of principles (usul) to secondary matters .(furu') to be dealt with through ijtihad and sunnah

Accordingly, utilization of any other source depends on the prior knowledge of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the criterion and standard for judging all other sources. We should judge hadith and sunnah in the light of the Qur'an. We can accept it only when .it is in accordance with the Qur'an, otherwise we do not accept it

There are four more books that come after the Qur'an, and are regarded as the most sacred and the most authentic sources (by the Shi'ah Muslims). They are: Al-Kafi, Man la yahduruhu al-faqih, Tahdhib, and Istibsar. There are also other sources like the Nahj al-Balaghah, and the prayers of al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah. All these books are secondary to the Qur'an, and their authenticity

.of source is not so absolute as that of the Qur'an

A hadith from al-Kafi is as trustworthy as it may be in conformity with the Qur'an, and reliable so far as its words comply with the teachings of the Qur'an and do not go against it. The Prophet (S) and the infallible Imams have said that their traditions should be checked in the light of the Qur'an; if they do not coincide with the words of the Qur'an, they should be regarded as false and fake, and as being wrongfully attributed to them; since they have not said anything that can go against the Qur'anic .teachings

Approaches to the Understanding of the Qur'an

point

Now that the necessity of understanding the Qur'an has been confirmed, let us see what are the ways of understanding this book. Generally for the purpose of a :profound understanding of any book it is necessary to study it in three ways

Authentication .۱

At this stage, we want to know to what extent the relationship of a book with its author is authentic. Suppose we want to study the Diwan-Hafiz, or the Ruba'iyyat of 'Umar Khayyam. At first, we have to see whether the work which is attributed to Hafiz, wholly belongs to him, or whether a part of it is Hafiz's work and the rest is an apocryphal annexation to it. Similarly in the case of 'Umar Khayyam, and others too, .we must judiciously scrutinize their works

It is here that the matter of examination of manuscripts --and for that matter the oldest

of them-- becomes relevant. Thus we see that none of these books can dispense with such a treatment. The Diwan-e-Hafiz printed by the late Qazvini, which has been based on some of the most authentic manuscripts of Hafiz's work, varies greatly from the ordinary editions of Hafiz, printed in Iran and Bombay, which are usually found in homes. The editions of Hafiz's works published during the last thirty or forty years .contain as much as twice the amount of Hafiz's original works

In view of certain modern manuscript experts of repute, they are fake; although we occasionally come across in them some verses which match the sublime heights of Hafiz's poetry. Likewise when we study the quatrains attributed to 'Umar Khayyam, we shall find nearly two hundred quatrains of the same poetical standard with only .minor differences usually possible even among the authentic verses of a single poet

However, if we look back at the history of Khayyam's times, we shall notice that the number of quatrains attributed to him may perhaps be less than twenty. The authenticity of the rest of them is either doubtful, or may with certainty be said to .belong to other poets

It means that the first step towards the research study of any book is to see to what extent the book in our hands is authentic, whether all the things recorded on its pages are genuine, or if only a part of it is authentic. Moreover, what criteria and standards should be employed in

order to judge the authenticity and genuineness of authorship? By what logic can the ?authenticity of any book be totally rejected or affirmed

The Qur'an is absolutely exempt from all such criteria that may be applicable to all worldly books. It is regarded as the exclusively singular book since the ancient times. No book of ancient days has remained above doubt to such extent despite a long lapse of several hundred years. No one can ever say about it that such and such a surah has a questionable authenticity or such and such a verse that is present in such .and such a manuscript is missing from another manuscript

The Qur'an stands above the notions of manuscript reading. There is no place for the slightest doubt that all of the verses that exist in the Qur'an are those conveyed to Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah (S) who communicated them as the miraculous Word of God. Nobody can ever claim that another version of the Qur'an existed anywhere, or .still exists

There has not been any Orientalist either who would begin the study of the Qur'an by saying, "let us trace from the earliest of the manuscripts of the Qur'an to see what was included in it and what was not." The Qur'an is absolutely free from this kind of investigation necessary in case of such books as the Bible, the Torah, or the Avesta, or the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, or the Gulistan of Sa'di and every other ancient or not so ancient

.work

Only for the study of the Qur'an no such questions arise, and the Qur'an is far above the usual norms of authenticity and the craft of manuscript reading. Moreover, besides the fact that the Qur'an is one of the heavenly scriptures and has been regarded by its followers as the most basic and authentic proof of the Prophet's (S) claim to prophethood, and as the greatest of his miracles, the Qur'an, unlike the Torah, was not revealed at one time and was not subject to later difficulties in .distinguishing the true manuscript

The verses of the Qur'an were revealed gradually during a span of twenty-three years. From the very first day, the eager Muslims memorized its verses, preserved and recorded them. Those were the days when the Muslim society was quite a simple society. No other book existed besides the Qur'an, and the Muslims were inevitably .inclined to memorize its verses

Their clear, unmarked minds and their powerful memory, their general ignorance about reading and writing, all these factors assisted them in acquiring and retaining their information regarding the Qur'an. This is the reason why the message of the Qur'an, which was so congenial to their sensibilities and their natural propensities, got .effectively imprinted on their hearts like inscription on stone

Since they believed it to be the Word of God, it was sacred to them also. They couldn't permit themselves that a single word or even a letter of it be altered or replaced in its text. They tried

to acquire the nearness to God by reciting its verses. It should be noted here that from the very early days the Prophet (S) had engaged a group of scribes for the purpose of writing down the Qur'an, who were known as the "Scribes of the ".Revelation

This should be regarded as one of the merits in favour of the Qur'an from which all other ancient books are excluded. The absence of any alteration and change in the Word of God was on account of this process of writing and recording from the very .beginning

The other reason responsible for the popularity of the Qur'an among the people was its extraordinary, supernatural literary and artistic dimension depicted in its rhetoric and eloquence. It was this strong literary attraction towards the Qur'an, which had an .appeal for the people, that prompted them to immediately memorize its verses

But unlike other literary works like the Diwan-e-Hafiz and poems of Rumi, which are exposed to meddling by admirers who think they are improving on the original, nobody could ever give himself the permission of meddling with the sacred text; for :the Qur'an immediately declared in one of its verses

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ

Had he [the Prophet (S)] invented against Us any sayings, We would have seized him (by the right hand, then We would surely have cut his life vein. (۶۹:۴۴-۴۶

There are several other verses in the Qur'an that forbid forgery in relation to

the Word of God. The gravity of this sin as stressed by the Qur'an had profound impression upon minds and served as a severe discouragement in this regard. In this way, before any type of alterations could have taken place in its verses, they were repeated often, thus reaching a stage that it was impossible to increase, diminish or alter even a single word in this heavenly book.

Accordingly, there is neither any need of any discussion about the Qur'an from the point of view of authenticity, nor does any scholar of the Qur'an throughout the world see any necessity of such a discussion. However, I think, it is necessary to remind the readers about the fact that, because of the rapid expansion of the Islamic domain and distance of the major part of the population living far away from Medina, which was the center of huffaz (those who memorized) of the Qur'an and the Companions of the Prophet, there arose the danger of occurrence of advertent or willful gradual alteration in the Qur'anic text.

But the prompt dexterity and timely awareness on the part of early Muslims averted this danger. Within the first five decades, they utilized the services of the Sahabah (the Companions of the Prophet) and those of the huffaz of the Qur'an for the purpose of averting the chances of conscious or inadvertent alterations in the text of the Qur'an. They distributed approved copies of the Qur'an from Medina to the surrounding regions. They thus checked

any chances of wrongdoing, especially on the part of the Jews, who are well-known .champions in this field

Analytical Study .۲

During this stage of study and analysis of a book, it is essential to understand these things: the subject it deals with, the goal that it pursues, its outlook regarding the world, its point of view concerning man and society, its style and treatment of the subject-whether the treatment of the subject is in an intellectual and scholarly .manner, or whether it has its own characteristic style

One more question that is relevant in this context is whether this book contains any message and guidance for humanity or not. If the answer to this question is in the ?affirmative, then what is the message that it conveys

The first group of questions are, of course, concerned with the point of view and outlook of the book regarding man and universe, about life and death etc. In other words, these questions are associated with the, world-outlook of the book, and in .(terms of Islamic philosophy, with its al-hikmat al-nazariyyah (theoretical wisdom

But the second group of questions is concerned with the perspective of future of mankind offered by the book. They deal with the suggested basis for moulding the human kind and human societies. This aspect may be regarded as the "message" of .the book

This sort of understanding is, however, concerned with the subject of the book, and is relevant in regard to all kinds of books, whether it is the medical treatise of

Ibn Sina, or if it is the Gulistan of Sa'di. It is possible that a book may lack an outlook as well as a message, or it may contain an outlook but not a message, or it may contain .both

Regarding the analytical study of the Qur'an we shall have to see, in general, what sort of problems does the Qur'an deal with, and what is its manner of presenting ?them. What is its manner of argument and its approach to various problems

Does the Qur'an, being the defender, presenter and protector of faith, and its message being a religious message, view reason as a rival to its teachings, and clings to a defensive posture against it, or whether it considers reason as a supporter and protector of faith and relies upon its power? These questions and various other .queries, arise during the analytical study of the Qur'an

Study of the Sources of Ideas .۳

At this stage, i.e. after verification of authenticity of the authorship of a book, and after thorough study and analysis of its contents, we come to the stage of exploring whether the contents of the book comprise of its author's own original ideas, or, the .ideas have been borrowed from some other source

For instance, in studying Hafiz's works, after verifying the authenticity of the verses and making their analytical study, we have to see whether these themes, ideas and thoughts that have been incorporated into Hafiz's poetry and poured into the moulds of his words, phrases, couplets, language and style, are actually the

creations of Hafiz, or whether only the words and phrases and the beauty, art and craftsmanship reflected in the verses come from Hafiz, whereas the thoughts and .ideas belong to someone else, or have been borrowed from another source

After ascertaining his artistic originality, the intellectual originality of Hafiz's works has .also to be established

This kind of study regarding Hafiz, or any other author, implies the study of the source and roots of the author's ideas and thought. This sort of study is secondary to an analytical study; that is, firstly the contents of the author's thought should be completely understood, and afterwards an attempt should be made to identify its .roots and sources

Otherwise, the result of one's effort will be something like the works of certain writers of history of various sciences, who write without any thorough knowledge of the subject, or similar to the works of those writers of philosophical books, who undertake, for instance, a comparative study of Ibn Sina and Aristotle, without any .knowledge of either

After superficial comparison and on discovering some literal similitudes between the works of the two great thinkers, they immediately sit down to pass a quick judgment. Although, for the purpose of a comparative study, very deep and profound knowledge of the ideas and thoughts of both of the philosophers is required. A lifetime of study is necessary for such a task; otherwise, it has no more value than can be given to blind .imitative conjectures

For the study and understanding of

the Qur'an, an analytical study must be followed by a comparative and historical study. That is, the contents of the Qur'an should be compared with other books that existed at that time, specially the religious ones. For the purpose of such a comparison, it is essential to keep in mind the conditions and relations of the Arabian peninsula with other parts of the world, and the number of educated Arabs living in .Mecca at the time

Only then we can arrive at an estimation of the influence of other books of those times on the contents of the Qur'an, and if we find something common in them, discover its proportions. We can then see whether the material that has been borrowed from other books is used in an original manner or not. Does the Qur'an go even further to the extent of playing a role in amending the contents of those books ?and setting right the errors occurring in them

The Three Distinguishing Characteristics of the Qur'an

point

Our study of the Qur'an acquaints us with three distinguishing characteristics of this holy book. The first distinguishing characteristic is the absolute authenticity of its source. That is, without the slightest need of any comparison between the oldest manuscripts, it is evident that what we recite as the verses of the Holy Qur'an, are .(exactly the same words presented before the world by Muhammad ibn 'Abd-Allah (S

The second characteristic feature of the Qur'an is the quality of its contents: its teachings are genuinely original and have not been

.adopted or plagiarized. It is the duty of an analytical study to prove this fact

The third characteristic of the Qur'an is its Divine identity: its teachings have been delivered to the Prophet from a world that transcends his thought and mind. The Prophet (S) was only a recipient of this revelation and message. This is the result that .we obtain from the study of the sources and roots of the Qur'an

But the study of the sources of the Qur'an, and confirmation of its originality, depend upon the analytical study. So I resolve to open this discussion with the analytical study of the Qur'an. We shall first see what is the subject matter of the Qur'an, what kind of problems are discussed in it, what type of problems have been given priority, and in .what manner those subjects are presented in it

If we are successful in our critical analysis, and acquire a sufficient understanding of the Qur'anic teachings, it will bring us to an acknowledgment of its principal aspect, .which is the Divine aspect of the Qur'an, the quality of its being a Divine miracle

Conditions Necessary for the Study of the Qur'an

The understanding of the Qur'an requires certain preliminaries which are briefly described here. The first essential condition necessary for the study of the Qur'an, is the knowledge of the Arabic language, such as for the understanding of Hafiz and Sa'di, it is impossible to get anywhere without the knowledge of the Persian language. In the same way, to acquaint oneself with the Qur'an without knowing the

.Arabic language is impossible

The other essential condition is the knowledge of the history of Islam; since, unlike the Bible and the Torah, this book was revealed gradually during a long period of twenty-three years of the Prophet's life, a tumultuous time in the history of Islam. It is on this account that every verse of the Qur'an is related to certain specific historical incident called sha'n-i nuzul. The sha'n-i nuzul, by itself does not restrict the meaning of the verses, but the knowledge of the particulars of revelation throws more light on .the subject of the verses in an effective way

The third condition essential for the understanding of the Qur'an, is the correct knowledge of the sayings of the Prophet (S). He was, according to the Qur'an itself, :the interpreter of the Qur'an par excellence. The Qur'an says

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْکَ الذِّکْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَکَّرُونَ

We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has" (been revealed to them ... " (۱۶:۴۴

:The Qur'an also says

هُوَ الَّذِی بَعَثَ فِی الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَکِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْکِتَابَ وَالْحِکْمَهَ وَإِنْ کَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِی ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

It is He who has sent among the illiterate a Messenger from among them, to recite" His sings to them, and to purify them and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom. " ((۶۲:۲

According to the Qur'an, the Prophet (S) himself is the exegetist and the interpreter of the Qur'anic text. Whatever has reached us from the

Prophet, is of great help in our understanding of the Qur'an. For the Shi'ah, who believe in the infallible Imams (A) also, and believe that the Prophet (S) has transmitted everything he obtained from God to his spiritual successors (awliya'), those genuine riwayat (narrations about the Prophet (S)) that have reached us through the Imams, possess the same degree of authenticity as those obtained directly from the Prophet (S). Accordingly, the authentic riwayat of the Imams are of .great help to us in our understanding of the Qur'an

A very important point to remember during the initial stages of study, is that we should try to understand the Qur'an with the help of the Qur'an itself; because, the verses of the Qur'an constitute a completely united integral whole, a coherent unified structure. If we single out any verse from the Qur'an and try to understand it in .isolation from the rest of the Book, it would not be a correct method

However, it is possible that we may happen to understand it, but the method is not recommended by caution, as certain verses of the Qur'an are explanatory for certain other verses. All great commentators of the Qur'an have affirmed this method; the infallible Imams also had approved of this manner of interpretation of the Qur'anic .verses

The Qur'an has its own specific mode of discussing various problems. There are instances where if a solitary verse is studied without placing it in its proper context, it gives quite a different sense

.than when it is seen under the light of the verses dealing with a similar subject

For instance, the specific mode and style of the Qur'an may be noticed from the distinction drawn between al-ayat al-muhkamat (the firm verses) and al-ayat al-mutashabihat (the ambiguous verses). There is a prevalent view regarding the muhkamat and the mutashabihat. Some people imagine that al-ayat al-muhkamat are such verses as whose meaning is quite simple and clear, whereas the meaning of al-ayat al-mutashabihat is cryptic, enigmatic and puzzling. According to this notion, men are only permitted to cogitate upon the meaning of al-ayat al-muhkamat, and al-ayat al-mutashabihat are basically inscrutable and beyond their understanding.

Here, the question arises, what is the philosophy underlying al-ayat al-mutashabihat? Why has the Qur'an put forward such verses that are incomprehensible? A brief answer to this question is that neither muhkam means “simple” and “clear”, nor mutashabih means “ambiguous”, “cryptic” and “enigmatic.” “Ambiguous” and “enigmatic” are adjectives applicable to sentences that do not convey the meaning in a direct and simple manner, as are sometimes met in the writings of various authors.

For example, when Sultan Mahmud rewarded the poetic efforts of Ferdowsi with a reward of an insignificant and humiliating amount of money, Ferdowsi did not accept it, and instead he accused Sultan Mahmud of the trait of parsimony in his versified lampoons. Some of them were quite clear and obvious whereas the others were not devoid of ambiguity and a lot of enigma. Ferdowsi is quite direct when

:he says

,Had the king's mother been an honourable lady

.He would have rewarded me with knee-high gold and silver

:However, when he remarks

,The palm of king Mahmud, the conqueror of lands

,Was nine times nine and three times four

what does he intend to say? Here Ferdowsi has made use of an enigmatic technique. Those who are interested would like to know the solution: ۹ X ۹=۸۱, ۳ X ۴=۱۲, and ۸۱ plus ۱۲ add up to ۹۳. Ferdowsi says, the Sultan's palm was just like ۹۳. It means that the fist of the Sultan was so tightly closed that only his thumb was free, and this thumb along with the index finger (which acquires the shape of ۹۲ and other three fingers make ۹۳. Through this obscure statement Ferdowsi wants to emphatically report the .miserliness of the Sultan

We shall see whether there are actually any enigmatic and abstruse verses in the Qur'an. Such an assumption contradicts with the text of the Qur'an which unequivocally states that it is a clear and comprehensible book whose verses provide guidance and shed light. The core of the problem is that some of the issues dealt with in the Qur'an are related to metaphysical matters and the transcendental world, :which cannot be expressed in ordinary language. In the words of Shaykh Shabistari

,The word fails to encompass meaning

.The ocean cannot be poured into a pot

Since the language of the Qur'an is the same as used by men, inevitably, the same diction is used for the

most sublime and spiritual themes as we human beings use for earthly subjects. But in order to prevent any misunderstanding about certain problems, some verses have been devised in such a way that they need to be explained with the help of other verses. There is no way except this. For example, the Qur'an wanted to point out to a truth namely, seeing God through the heart; that is, to witness the presence of God by :means of one's heart. This idea has been expressed in the following terms

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاضِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

(Some) faces on the Day shall be bright, looking towards their Lord. (۷۵:۲۲-۲۳)

Uniqueness of the Qur'an

The Qur'an makes use of the verb "looking," and no other word more suitable could be available for the expression of the desired sense. But to avert the possibility of any :doubt, the Qur'an explains in other place

(Vision perceives Him not, and He perceives all vision. (۶:۱۰۴

The second verse makes the reader distinguish between two different meanings conveyed by the same word. In order to avoid any possibility of ambiguity in its exalted themes, the Qur'an asks us to check the mutashabihat against the :mahkamat

هُوَ الَّذِی أَنْزَلَ عَلَیْکَ الْکِتَابَ مِنْهُ آیَاتٌ مُحْکَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْکِتَابِ

He sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses firm (ayat mahkamat) that are (the essence of the Book. (۳:۶

Thereby, the Qur'an means that there are certain verses whose firmness cannot be denied and other meanings cannot be derived from them, except their real ones. Such verses are the

mother' of the Book (umm al-kitab). In the same way as a mother is the refuge to her' child, or a cosmopolitan city (umm al-qura) is the center of small cities, al-ayat al-muhkamat are also regarded as the axes of the mutashabihat.

Al-ayat al-mutashabihat are, of course, to be cogitated upon and understood, but they are to be pondered upon with the help of al-ayat al-muhkamat. Any inference drawn without the help of the mother-verses would not be correct and reliable.

Is the Qur'an Understandable?

During the analysis and study of the Qur'an, the first question that arises is whether the Qur'an can be studied and understood. Has this book been introduced for the purpose of studying and understanding it, or whether it is just for reading and reciting and obtaining reward and blessing?

The reader, possibly, may wonder at raising of such a question. To him it may appear beyond doubt that the Qur'an is meant for the purpose of knowing and understanding it. Nevertheless, in view of various undesirable currents, which due to numerous reasons came into existence in the Muslim world regarding the question of understanding of the Qur'an, and which had an important role in bringing about the decline of Muslims, we shall discuss this matter in brief.

Regrettably, the roots of those degenerate and dangerous notions still persist in our societies. So I consider it necessary to elaborate on this topic.

Among the Shi'ah scholars of three or four centuries ago, there appeared a group which believed that the Qur'an is

not a hujjah ("proof", meaning a legal source usable for vindication). Among the four sources of fiqh that have been regarded as the criteria and standard for the understanding of the Islamic problems by Muslim scholars, i.e. the Qur'an, the sunnah (tradition), 'aql (reason) and ijma' (consensus of opinion), they did not recognize three of them. Regarding ijma', they said that it belongs to the Sunni tradition and they could not follow it.

Concerning reason, they maintained that reason can also err, and reliance on reason is not legitimate. About the Qur'an they respectfully asserted that the Qur'an is greater in station than being subject to study and comprehension by us humble human creatures. It is only the privilege of the Prophet and the Imams to ponder over the verses of the Holy Qur'an. We ordinary human beings have only the right to read and recite them. This group was that of the Akhbariyun or Akhbaris.

The Akhbaris regarded hadith and chronicles as the only permissible sources of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). One may be astounded to learn that in some of the Qur'anic exegeses written by these people, they mentioned only those verses about which the tradition existed, and refrained from mentioning other verses as if they are not a part of the Qur'an.

Such a kind of practice was an injustice to the Qur'an. This shows that a society that could neglect and alienate their own heavenly book and that too of the standard and stature of the Qur'an, is not

at all up to the Qur'anic standards. Besides the Akhbaris there were other groups who also regarded the Qur'an as inaccessible to the ordinary human intellect. Among them the Ash'arites can be named, who believed that the knowledge of the Qur'an does not necessarily mean that its verses should be pondered over, but the real meanings are .the same as that the words literally communicate

According to them, whatever we understand from the outward meaning, we have to be satisfied with it. We should not be concerned with the secret and inner meanings. It was quite natural that this sort of thinking regarding the Qur'an, very rapidly, gave rise to serious deviations and grave misunderstandings. Since they were forced on the one hand to the task of interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'anic verses, and, on the other hand, banished reason also from the realm of religious learning, as a result, they were forced to adopt merely vulgar and superficial interpretations of the .Qur'anic verses

On account of their faulty way of thinking, they deviated from the regular course of correct thinking, and thus gave way to distorted and faulty religious vision. As the result of this type of religious thinking, heretical beliefs like the personification of God the Almighty, and numerous other distorted ideas like the possibility of visual .perception of God, His possession of physical characteristics etc., came into existence

Opposing the group which abandoned the Qur'an, another group came into existence which used the Qur'an as the

means to fulfill their selfish aims. They gave the Qur'anic verses such interpretations as were favourable to their selfish interests, and wrongfully attributed certain ideas to .the Qur'anic text that were not at all in agreement with the spirit of the Qur'an

In answer to every objection that was made against them, they said that none except themselves could understand the esoteric and secret meaning of the Qur'anic verses, and whatever they stated was based on the understanding and knowledge of the .esoteric meaning of the verses

The champions of this movement in the history of Islam consist of two groups: the first group are the Isma'ilis, who are also known as the Batinis (secret sect), and the other are the Sufis. Most of the Isma'ilis are found in India and some of them are in Iran. They had formed an empire in Egypt known as the Fatimid caliphate. The .Isma'ilis are so-called Shi'ahs who believe in six Imams

But all the Twelver Imami Shi'ah scholars are unanimous in the opinion that in spite of their belief in six Imams, the Isma'ilis stand at a greater distance from the Shi'ite faith than the non-Shi'ite sects. The Sunnis, who do not believe in any of the Imams in the same sense as the Shi'ah do, nevertheless are nearer to the Shi'ah than these "Six-".Imami Shi'ahs

The Isma'ilis, on account of their batini beliefs and secretive practices have played a treacherous role in the history of Islam and have had a big hand

.in causing serious deviations in the realm of Islam

Besides the Isma'ilis, the Sufis are also charged with distortion of the Qur'anic verses and had a long hand in interpreting them according to their personal beliefs. Here I present a specimen of their exegesis so that the extent and method of their :misinterpretation may be known

The anecdote of Ibrahim (A) and his son Isma'il is described by the Qur'an as follows: It occurred to Ibrahim (A) in his dream that he has to sacrifice his son for the sake of God. At first he is perplexed regarding such an instruction; but as he repeatedly has the dream reiterating the same theme, he becomes certain of the Will of God and decides to obey the Divine command. He puts the whole matter before his son, who :also faithfully accepts his father's proposal of executing the Divine command

يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَىٰ فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَىٰ ۚ قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ ۖ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

My son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; consider what thinkest thou?" He" said, "My father, do as thou art bidden; thou shalt find me, God willing, one of the (steadfast." (۳۷:۱۰۲

Here the aim is the expression of total submission and resignation towards the Divine decree. For the same reason the father and son are ready to execute the Divine command with whole-hearted purity and sincerity, but the execution of the command was stopped by the Will of

God. But the same incident is interpreted by the Sufis in this fashion: Ibrahim here represents intellect and reason ('aql) and Isma'il represents the self (nafs); the Qur'anic anecdote is an allegory that hints at the attempt of reason to murder the .(human self (nafs

It is obvious that such interpretation of the Qur'an is like wanton treatment of it, and presents a distorted perspective of its teachings. It is in the context of such deviate interpretations of the Qur'an based upon personal or sectarian bias and interests that the Prophet has said: One who interprets the Qur'an according to his wish, should be .certain of his place in hell

This kind of frivolous attitude towards the verses of the Qur'an amounts to the betrayal of the Qur'an and that too of a grievous degree. The Qur'an itself strikes a middle course between the stagnant and narrow-minded attitude of the Akhbaris and the unwarranted and deviate interpretations of the Batinis. It recommends a course of sincere, disinterested study and asks for unbiased and unprejudiced meditation over its meanings. Not only the believers and the faithful, but even the infidels are .invited by it to contemplate over its verses

The Qur'an demands that it verses should be first contemplated over, before forming any adverse opinion against them. Addressing the opponents, it says, why they don't ponder over the Qur'an, what sort of hearts they possess, they are as if shut close :and sealed

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

What, do they not ponder“

(the Qur'an? Or is it that there are locks upon their hearts? "(۴۷:۲۴

:The Qur'an also says in one of its verses

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

This is) a Book We have revealed to you abounding in good, that they may ponder the) (verses.(۳۸:۲۹

That is, We have not sent the Qur'an to be kissed, embraced and put on the niche to :gather dust, but for men to read and to contemplate about its contents

لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

That those endowed with understanding may ponder its signs and so remember. "" ((۳۸:۲۹

The above verse and scores of other such verses emphasize the importance of contemplation in the Qur'an and interpretation of the Qur'anic verses, although not an interpretation based on personal caprices and bias, but a just, truthful and balanced interpretation free of all traces of selfish interests. If we try to comprehend the Qur'an in an honest and unbiased way, it is not at all necessary to solve all problems .that we find in it. In this regard the Qur'an is similar to Nature

In Nature, too, a number of mysteries have neither been solved yet, nor can they be solved in present conditions, yet are likely to be solved in the future. Moreover, in studying and understanding nature, man has to tailor his ideas in accordance with Nature itself. He is forced to interpret Nature in accordance with its reality. He cannot .define Nature in terms of his own caprices and inclinations

The Qur'an, like

the book of Nature, is a book that has not been sent for a specific age and time. Had it been otherwise, all the secrets of the Qur'an would have been discovered in the past; .this heavenly Book would not have presented its charm, freshness and vitality

But we see that the possibility of contemplation, reflection and discovery of new dimensions is inexhaustible in the case of this Holy Book. This is a point that has amply been emphasized and clarified by the Prophet and the Imams. In a tradition, it is related from the Prophet (S) that the Qur'an, like the sun and the moon, will present its .movement and continuity; that is, the Qur'an is not static or monotonous

In some other place the Prophet has said that outwardly the Qur'an is beautiful and inwardly it is deep and unfathomable. In 'Uyun akhbar al-Rida, from the Imam al-Rida (A), it is quoted that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A) was asked about the secret of it that as the time passes and the more it is read and recited, the Qur'an increases in its novelty :and freshness day by day. The Imam al-Sadiq (A) answered

.Because the Qur'an is not for an exclusive age or for an exclusive people

The Qur'an has been sent for all ages and for all human beings. It is so composed that in spite of changes in knowledge, outlook and approach through various times and ages, it surpasses all learning and knowledge in all ages. While it

encompasses mysteries and abstruse intricacies for the reader of every age, at the same time it presents a great feast of meanings and ideas that can satiate the needs .of every time in accordance with the capacity of that particular age

Issues in an Analytical Study of the Qur'an

point

Now we shall proceed to study the contents of the Qur'an from an analytic viewpoint. Of course, if we were to deal with every subject of the Qur'an separately, it would call for --as Rumi would say-- seventy tons of paper. So we will confine our discussion .mainly to general and then a few particular issues

The Qur'an has dealt with a vast range of subjects, and in this process, it is more concerned with certain subjects and less with others. The universe and its Creator are among the most recurring themes of the Qur'an. We must try to see how it treats this theme. Is its outlook philosophical or gnostic? Is its treatment similar to that of other religious books like the Bible and the Torah? Is it similar to that of the religious books ?of Hinduism? Does it deal with this problem in its own independent manner

The other problem that is repeatedly treated by the Qur'an is the problem of the universe or the world of creation. We must examine the outlook of the Qur'an about the universe. Does it regard the universe and all creation to be an exercise in vanity ?and futility or does it regard it as being based on coherent truth

Does it

consider the state of affairs in the universe as being based upon a series of laws and principles, or does it regard it as a chaotic phenomenon in which nothing is the cause or condition of any other thing? Among the general issues dealt by the Qur'an is the problem of the human being. The Qur'anic outlook regarding the human being must be analyzed. Does the Qur'an possess an optimistic outlook of man? Does it speak of him in pessimistic and negative terms? Does the Qur'an consider man as a despicable ?creature, or does it acknowledge his nobility and dignity

The other problem dealt with in the Qur'an is the problem of human society. We have to see if the Qur'an considers the society to be primary and the individual as .secondary or whether it subordinates the society to the individual

Are societies, according to the Qur'an, subject to laws governing their life and death, their rise and decline, or are these conditions applicable to individuals alone? In the same way, its conception of history also needs to be clarified. What is the Qur'anic view regarding history? What are the forces that control the dynamics of history? To what extent can an individual's influence affect the course of history in the view of the ?Qur'an

The Qur'an deals with numerous other issues. I shall enumerate some of them here. One of them is the point of view of the Qur'an about itself. The other issue is related to the Prophet (S) and

its manner of introducing and addressing him. Another issue is its definition of a .believer (mu'min) and his characteristics and so on

Furthermore, each of these general issues possesses various branches and divisions. For example, when discussing mankind and its situation, it is natural to speak about morality. Or, when speaking about society, the problem of human relationships also unavoidably enters the discussion. The same is true of such notions as “enjoining .good and forbidding evil,” and the problem of social classes

?How does the Qur'an Introduce Itself

For the purpose of analysing Qur'anic themes, it is better to start by examining the opinion of the Qur'an about itself and its manner of self-introduction. The first and foremost thing that the Qur'an pronounces about itself is that all of its words, phrases and sentences are the Word of God. It makes clear that the Prophet (S) was not its author; rather the Prophet only related whatever was revealed to him through the .agency of the Ruh al-Qudus (Gabriel) with the permission of God

The Qur'an describes its other function as the presentation of the Prophetic mission, which is aimed at guidance of humanity, by delivering it from darkness and leading it :towards light

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

A Book We have sent down to thee that thou mayest bring forth mankind from the“ (darkness into the light... “ (۱۴:۱

Without doubt the darkness of ignorance is one of the vices from which the Qur'an emancipates humanity and leads it towards the light of knowledge and wisdom. ,However

if merely ignorance were regarded as darkness, then the philosophers could have accomplished this job. But there exist other evils more dangerous than the vice of .ignorance, and to subdue them is beyond the power of sheer knowledge

Among them are the vices of worship of material benefits, egoism, enslavement to desires, and greed, which are considered to be personal and moral vices. Social vices like oppression and discrimination manifest the spiritual darkness of a society. In Arabic, the word zulm (injustice and oppression) is derived from the same root as zulmah (darkness), which shows that injustice is a form of social and spiritual darkness. To struggle against such forms of darkness is the responsibility and mission of the Qur'an and other heavenly books. Addressing Prophet Moses (A), the Qur'an :says

أَنْ أَخْرِجْ قَوْمَکَ مِنَ الظُّلُماتِ إِلَی النُّورِ

(That thou mayest bring forth your people from the darkness into the light ... " (۱۴:۵"

This darkness, this shadow, is the darkness of Pharaoh's oppression and injustice and .that of his clique. The light is the light of justice and freedom

The exegetists of the Qur'an emphasize the point that whenever the Qur'an mentions darkness, it always uses it in the plural form although it always uses light in its singular form. This means that the word, (darkness) includes all sorts of darkness, all of the evil ways that lead towards darkness, and that (light) signifies one single right path -- the path of righteousness, whereas the ways of deviation and perversion are many. In Suurat

:al-Baqarah, the Qur'an says

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ مِنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ

God is the Protector of the believers; He brings them forth from the darkness into the“ light. And the unbelievers --their protectors are taghut, that bring them forth from the (light into the darkness ...” (۲:۲۵۷

The Qur'an determines its goal to be the breaking of the chains of ignorance, misguidance, moral and social corruption and destruction, or in other words, to dissipate all sorts of (darkness) and to guide humanity in the direction of justice, .goodness and light

The Language of the Qur'an

The other issue is that of gaining familiarity with the language of the Qur'an and the recitation of it. There are some people who think that the Qur'an is to be read merely for the purpose of obtaining spiritual reward (thawab) without need of understanding anything of its contents. They continuously recite the Qur'an, but if they are even once asked) “Do you understand the meaning of what you are reading?” they cannot answer. To recite the Qur'an is essential and good, being regarded as the first step necessary for comprehending its contents; and not merely as a means for gaining .Divine reward

The comprehension of the meaning of the Qur'an has certain peculiarities to which due attention must be paid. While other books are read for the purpose of acquiring the knowledge of novel ideas that merely involve reason and the rational faculties of the reader's mind, the Qur'an must be studied

:with the intention of educating oneself. The Qur'an itself clarifies this point

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

A book We have sent down to thee, blessed, that men possessed of mind may“ (ponder its signs end so remember.” (۳۸:۲۹

One of the functions of the Qur'an is to instruct and to teach. For this purpose, the Qur'an addresses human reason and speaks in logical and demonstrative terms. There is also another language that the Qur'an makes use of. But this language is not used to appeal to the faculty of reason, but to the heart. This is the language of feeling. Whosoever wants to acquaint himself with the Qur'an, should be familiar with both of the languages and be able to make use of both of them simultaneously. It is a .grave mistake to separate one from the other

That which is termed here as the heart, is the great source of profound feeling that resides within all human beings. This is sometimes also called “the sense of being”, i.e. .the feeling of relationship between human existence and the Absolute Being

One who knows the language of the heart, when he addresses the human being in this language, can move the inner depths of his being. It is not merely the mind and the intellect alone which is affected, but his whole being, which is profoundly influenced. This sort of influence can perhaps be illustrated by the example of music. The various forms of music share the common quality which is

stimulation of human feelings. Music appeals to the human soul and immerses it into a .specific world of feeling

The nature of feelings, excited by different kinds of music, of course, varies. Certain types of music may be associated with the passions of valour and bravery. In the past, on the battlefield, the effects of martial music were evident. Sometimes its effects were so strong that the frightened soldiers who would not dare come out of their bunkers, were made to march in fervour despite fierce attacks from enemy's .ranks

It is possible that certain other kinds of music may excite sensual feelings and invite the listener to succumb to sensual vices. The results of such music are noticeable in the moral waywardness of our own times. Perhaps no other thing could have so effectively broken down the walls of morality and chastity to the extent of this kind of music. Other kinds of instinctive feelings and passions, whether aroused by means of music or by some other means, can be controlled when addressed in the language .that appeals to them

One of the most sublime instincts and emotions present in all human beings is the urge for religion and the natural quest for God. It is in the same heavenly echoes that the Qur'an speaks to the Divine instincts of mankind. The Qur'an itself recommends that its verses be recited in fine and beautiful rhythms; for it is in those heavenly .rhythms that it speaks to the Divine nature of man

The Qur'an, describing itself, maintains that it speaks in two languages. Sometimes it introduces itself as the Book of meditation, logic and demonstration; at other times as the Book of feeling and love. In other words, it does not merely seek to nourish the intellect and thought, but also nurtures the human soul.

The Qur'an lays great emphasis on its own specific quality of music, a music which more than any other music, is effective in arousing the profound and sublime feelings of the human heart. The Qur'an directs the believers to devote a few hours of the night to reciting its verses, and to recite them during their ritual prayers when their attention is turned towards God. Addressing the Prophet, the Qur'an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُزَّمِّلُ () قُمِ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا () نِصْفَهُ أَوِ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا () أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا

“O thou enwrapped in thy robes, keep vigil the night, except a little (a half of it, or diminish a little, or add a little) and chant the Qur'an very distinctly.” (۷۳:۱ -۴)

It asks the Prophet (S) to recite the Qur'an while standing for the prayers. Tartiil means to recite neither too hastily that words cannot be distinguished, nor too slowly that their connection be lost. It commands the Prophet (S) to recite its verses rhythmically, and at the same time to cogitate upon their meaning.

Again, in a later verse of the same surah, the Prophet is reminded that he needs enough sleep to effectively perform the daily

chores of business or jihad in the path of God; nevertheless, he should not forget to .seclude himself for worship

It were the same rhythms of the Qur'an that became the singular source of spiritual joy and strength, and the means of producing inner purity and sincerity among Muslims. It was the same music of the Qur'an which, in a very short period of time, converted the barbarous tribes of the Arabian peninsula, into a steadfast nation of committed believers, who could grapple with the greatest powers of the age and .overthrow them

The Muslims did not merely view the Qur'an as a book of moral advice and instruction alone, but also, as a spiritual and ideological tonic. They recited the Qur'an with devotion of heart during their intimate nightly supplications, and during the day, they derived from it the strength to attack the unbelievers like roaring lions. The Qur'an had just such an expectation of those who had found their faith. Addressing the :Prophet, it says

Obey not the unbelievers, but struggle against them with it [the Qur'an] striving (mightily. (۲۵:۵۲

The Qur'an advises the Prophet (S) not to pay heed to the words of the infidels and to stand firmly against them equipped with the weapon of the Qur'an. It assures him that the ultimate victory shall be his. The life of the Prophet (S) itself is a positive proof of this assurance. He stood all alone against enemies without any support except the Qur'an, and the same Qur'an meant everything to

.him

It produced warriors for him, furnished arms and forces, until, ultimately, the enemies were totally subdued. The Qur'an drew towards him individuals from the enemy's camp, and caused them to submit before the Messenger of God. In this way the .Divine pledge was fulfilled

When the Qur'an calls its language “the language of the heart,” it means the heart which it seeks to purify, enlighten and stimulate. This language is other than the language of music that occasionally arouses sensual feelings. It is also different from the language of martial music that arouses the spirit of heroism in the hearts of soldiers and strengthens and enhances their enthusiasm. Rather, it is the language :which converted the Arab Bedouins into inspired mujahidin, for whom it was said

.They carried their visions on their swords

Those people carried their vision, their ideology, their religion and spiritual discoveries on their swords, and used them in the defence of those ideals and ideas. The notions of private and personal interest were alien to them. Though they were not innocent and infallible, and they did commit mistakes, yet they were those who rightly fitted the :description

,Standing in prayer during nights

.fasting during daytime

Every moment of day and night, they were in contact with the depths of Being. Their .nights were passed in worship, and days in jihad

It is on account of this characteristic, that the Qur'an is a book of the heart and the soul. Its appeal overwhelms the soul and brings tears flowing from the eyes and

makes the heart tremble. It stresses this point and considers it true even of the :"“People of the Book

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ هُمْ بِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ () وَإِذَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ إِنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مُسْلِمِينَ

Those to whom We gave the Book before this believe in it, and, when it is recited to them, they say, 'We believe in it; surely it is the Truth from our Lord; even before it we (were of those who surrender. (۲۸:۵۲-۵۳

It describes a group of people who undergo a state of veneration and awe when the Qur'an is recited before them. They affirm faith in all the contents of the Book, declare everything in it to be nothing but truth and their veneration of it continues to increase. In another verse, the Qur'an affirms that among the Ahl al-Kitab (The People of the Book), the Christians are closer to the Muslims than the idolaters and Jews. Then a group of Christians who believed and became Muslims on hearing the Qur'an are :described in these words

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰ أَعْيُنَهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُوا مِنَ الْحَقِّ ۖ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ

And when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears, because of the truth they recognize. They say, “Our Lord we (believe; so do Thou write us down among the witnesses.” (۵:۸۳

:In another place, while describing the believers, the Qur'an says

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ

الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِيَ تَقْشَعِرُّ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

God has sent down the fairest discourse as a book, consimilar in its oft repeated parts, whereat shiver the skins of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their (hearts soften to the remembrance of God ... (۳۹:۲۳

In these, as well as in many other verses (such as ۱۹:۵۸, ۶۱:۱, etc.), the Qur'an tells us that it is not merely a book of knowledge and analysis; but at the same time that it makes use of logical arguments that appeal to the intellect, it also speaks to the finer .sensibilities of the human soul

The Qur'an's Addressees

Another point that has to be inferred from the Qur'anic text during its analytical study is to determine the identity of those who are addressed by it. There are certain expressions like "guidance for the God fearing," "guidance and good tiding for the believers," "to admonish and caution him who is alive," which often recur in the Qur'an. Here the question may arise: Of what need is guidance for those who are already guided, the pious and the righteous? Moreover, we see that the Qur'an describes :itself in these words

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ وَلَتَعْلَمُنَّ نَبَأَهُ بَعْدَ حِينٍ

It is but a reminder unto all beings, and you shall surely know its tiding, after a while. ((۳۸:۸۷-۸۸

Then, is this book meant for all the people of the world, or is it for the believers alone? In another verse addressing

:the Prophet, God the Most Exalted, says

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ

(We have not sent thee, save as a mercy unto all beings. " (۲۱:۱۰۷"

A more detailed explanation of this matter would be undertaken during the course of later discussion regarding the historical aspect of the Qur'an. Here it is just sufficient to mention that the Qur'an is addressed to all the people of the world. It does not single out any particular nation or group. Everyone who accepts the invitation of the Qur'an is assured of spiritual salvation. However, the verses which mention the Qur'an as the book of guidance for the believers and the God-fearing (mu'minun and muttaqun), clearly specify the kind of people who will be attracted towards it and .others who will turn away from it

The Qur'an never names any particular nation or tribe as being its devotees. It does not take sides with a specially chosen people. Unlike other religions, the Qur'an never associates itself with the interests of any specific class. It does not say, for example, that it has come to safeguard the interests of the workers or the peasants. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the point that its purpose is to establish justice. :Speaking about the prophets, it says

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

And We sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that men might uphold" (justice ... "(۵۷:۲۵

The Qur'an advocates justice for all mankind, not merely for this or that class, tribe or .nation

It does not, for example, like Nazism and other such cults, stir up the passions of prejudice to attract people. Similarly, it does not, like certain schools of thought like Marxism, base its appeal upon the human weakness of interest-seeking and enslavement to material motivations to incite people; because the Qur'an believes in the essential primariness of the rational consciousness of man and his intrinsic .conscience

It believes that it is on the basis of its moral potentialities and its truth-conscious human nature that mankind is placed firmly on the path of progress and evolution. This is the reason why its message is not limited to the working or farming class or .exclusively to the oppressed and deprived

The Qur'an addresses both the oppressors as well as the oppressed, and calls them to follow the right path. Prophet Moses (A) delivers the message of God to both Bani .Israel and Pharaoh, and asks them to believe in the Lord and to move in His path

Prophet Muhammad (S) extends his invitation both to the chieftains of Quraysh and to ordinary persons like Abu Dharr and 'Ammar. The Qur'an cites numerous examples of an individual's revolt against his own self and his voluntary return from the path of .deviation to the straight one

But, at the same time, the Qur'an is aware of the point that the restoration and repentance of those immersed in a life of luxury and opulence is comparatively more difficult than that of those familiar with the

hardships of life: the oppressed and the deprived, who are, as a matter of fact, naturally more inclined towards justice; whereas the rich and wealthy, at the very first step, have to forgo their personal and class interests and abandon their wishes .and aspirations

The Qur'an declares that its followers are those who have a clear and pure conscience. They are drawn to it solely by the love of justice and truth, which is ingrained in the nature of all human beings ---not under the urge for material .interests and worldly desires and allurements

Conception of Reason in the Qur'an

point

Heretofore we have discussed briefly the diction of the Qur'an, and said that, for the purpose of communicating its message, the Qur'an makes use of two types of languages, namely, the language of rational argument and the language of feeling. Each of these languages has a specific appeal. The first type addresses and appeals to the intellect or reason, while the second one is meant to appeal to the heart. Now .(we shall examine the point of view of the Qur'an regarding reason ('aql

It is to be seen whether or not the Qur'an acknowledges the "authority" (hajjah) of reason --as the scholars of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and usul put it. This means whether or not we should respect the judgements of reason and act according to them if they happen to be correct and rightly deduced by it. Moreover, if one acts according to the dictates of reason and occasionally falls into error, will God exonerate

him for it, or whether He will punish him on account of that error? And, if one fails to ?act according to the ruling of reason, does he deserve punishment

Evidence in Favour of the Authority of Reason

point

The issue of the authority of reason in Islam is certain. Since the earliest times until the present, none amongst the Islamic scholars --except for a very small number-- has ever negated the authority of reason; they have counted it as one of the four .sources of Islamic fiqh

The Qur'an's Emphasis on Rationalism .۱

Since our discussion is about the Qur'an, I think it necessary to produce arguments concerning the authority of reason from the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an, in various ways, confirms the authority of reason. About sixty to seventy verses can be cited --and that, too, for just one of the various ways, as mentioned-- in which the Qur'an indicates that such and such a matter has been mentioned for reason to reflect on. In :one instance, the Qur'an refers to this issue in a striking statement

إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الصُّمُّ الْبُكْمُ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

Surely the worst of beasts in God's sight are those that are deaf and dumb and do not (reason. (۸:۲۲

Of course, it is obvious that the Qur'an does not mean the physically deaf and dumb, but those who do not want to listen to truth, or those who, when they hear, do not wish to admit it with their tongues. In the view of the Qur'an, the ears which are unable to listen to truth and which are only used

for listening to absurd and nonsensical things, are deaf. The tongue which is merely .used to utter nonsense is dumb

The people, who do not reason, are those who do not make use of their intellect and their faculty of thought. Such are not fit to be called human beings. The Qur'an includes them among the beasts. In another verse, while bringing up a subject related to Divine Unity (al-tawhid), the Qur'an refers to the issue of unity of Divine Acts, and :says

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

(It is not for any soul to believe, save by the leave of God... (١٠:١٠٠

After stating this profound issue --a problem which is not easily comprehensible to :every human mind-- the Qur'an continues the verse like this

وَيَجْعَلُ الرِّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

(And He lays abomination upon those who do not reason. (١٠:١٠٠

In these two verses, which I quote here for the sake of example, the Qur'an, in the terms of logic, invites us to ratiocination. There are many other verses in the Qur'an which, on the basis of consequential signification, can be said to accept the authority of reason. In other words, the Qur'an makes statements which cannot be accepted without accepting the authority of reason. For instance, an opponent is asked to :forward rational argument in favour of his position

قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

(Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful. (٢:١١١

This can only be inferred to mean the Qur'an's ratification of the authority of reason. In another place

it uses syllogistic argument to prove the existence of the Necessary Being (wajib al-wujud):

لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا

Were there gods in them [earth and heaven] other than God, they would surely disintegrate ... (۲۱:۲۲)

In these verses the Qur'an has framed a conditional proposition, which exempts or excludes the antecedent premise for arriving at a conclusion which is consequent upon it. Thus the Qur'an aims at emphasizing the role of reason and refutes the view of some of the religions that faith is alien to, or, is incompatible with reason, and that to embrace faith one has to suspend his rational faculty and concentrate upon heart alone, so that it may absorb the Divine light and become illuminated by it. This view is totally negated and refuted by the Qur'an.

۲. References to the Law of Causality

The other argument that supports the view that the Qur'an approves of the ultimate authority of reason, is that it defines various problems in terms of cause-and-effect relationship. The cause-and-effect relation-ship, or the law of causation, is the foundation of rational thinking. This law is honoured by the Qur'an and is also employed by it.

The Qur'an speaks on behalf of God, the Almighty, the Creator of the system of cause and effect. Despite the fact that His Word transcends the limitations of causality, the Qur'an is not oblivious of pointing out to the system of causality operating in the universe; it views all phenomena and events as being subservient to this system. The following verse supports this view:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ

لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

(God changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves ... (۱۳:۱۱

The Qur'an intends to say that, although all destinies depend on the Will of God, He never imposes upon human beings such fate as is outside and alien to their determination, will and action. The destinies of societies also change according to their intrinsic system of functioning. God does not extravagantly alter the destiny of a nation without any specific reason, unless they themselves bring about a major change in their system of social and moral values and their manner of performing .their individual duties

The Qur'an urges Muslims to study the conditions and circumstances of societies of the past and to take lesson from their history. It is evident that if the destinies of races and nations were random, or dependent upon accidents, or were prescribed from .above, the advice to study and draw a lesson would not have any sense

By laying emphasis on it, the Qur'an intends to remind us that a uniform system of laws governs the destinies of all the nations of the world. It also reminds us that if the conditions of a society in which we live, are similar to the conditions prevalent in a :society of the past, the same fate awaits us too. Elsewhere, the Qur'an says

فَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ فَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا وَبِئْرٍ مُعَطَّلَةٍ وَقَصْرٍ مَشِيدٍ أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ

بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا

How many a city We have destroyed in its evildoing, and now it is fallen down upon its turrets. How many a ruined well, a tall palace. What, have they not journeyed in the land so that they have hearts to understand with, or ear to hear with ... ? (۲۲:۴۵-۴۶)

From this statement, we can infer that the affirmation of the law of causality and the approval of the cause-and-effect relationship, imply the acceptance of authority of reason.

۳. Rational Basis of Divine Commands

Another argument which proves that the Qur'an believes in the ultimate authority of reason, is that the Qur'an always explains the rationale behind its commands, laws and precepts. The scholars of usul al-din (the principles of the Faith) maintain that the harms and benefits caused by human deeds are among the reasons behind laws and commands. For example, while at one place the Qur'an ordains the performance of prayers, in another place it explains the philosophy of prayer:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

Indeed prayer forbids indecency and dishonour ... (۲۹:۴۵)

It mentions the spiritual effects of prayer, and states how the prayer can edify man. It explains that it is on account of this exaltation that man can dissociate himself from indecencies. Elsewhere, after laying down rules for observing the fast, the Qur'an explains the rationale for its command:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

Prescribed for you is the Fast, even as it was prescribed for those that were before you --haply you will be God-fearing.

(۲:۱۸۳)

Similarly, with respect to other commandments like those regarding zakat (alms) and jihad, the Qur'an clarifies their necessity for individual, as well as for society. In this way, the Qur'an, not withstanding the transcendental nature of Divine commandments, clarifies fully their worldly and terrestrial relevance, and asks men to cogitate upon their rationale until their meaning becomes explicit, so that it may not be imagined that these laws are based on a series of occult notions beyond the power .of human comprehension

Combating Deviations of Reason .۴

Another evidence in favour of the Qur'an's affirmation of the authority of reason -- which is more conclusive than that mentioned above-- is the battle it launched against all those agents which obstruct the proper functioning of reason. For clarification of .this point, we are forced to mention certain things in the way of an introduction

The human mind can, in many cases, fall into error. This fact is acknowledged by all of us. However, this danger is not limited to the intellect alone, but can equally befall the senses, and feelings as well. Just for the sense of vision, scores of visual errors and optical illusions have been pointed out. In the case of reason, too, there are times when people frame an argument and rationale and draw an inference on its basis, but .later on they realize that the basis of their conclusion was erroneous

Here the question arises, whether the faculty of reason should be suspended on account of its occasional failures, or whether we should employ other

means for discovering the errors of the intellect and seek to avoid such errors. In answering this question, the Sophists said that reason should not be relied upon, and that, basically, argumentation and reasoning is an absurd practice.

Other philosophers have given a fitting reply to the Sophists, and said that though the senses can also err like reason, but no one has ever recommended their suspension. Since it was not possible to discard reason, the philosophers resolved to find ways of making reason secure from error. During their efforts in this regard, they discovered that all arguments consist of two parts, namely, matter and form. Like a building which has various ingredients in its construction, like, lime, cement, steel, etc. (matter), to acquire a specific structure (form).

In order to attain the permanence and perfection of its construction, it is essential to procure proper material as well as to draw a perfect and faultless plan. For the correctness and accuracy of an argument, too, it is essential that its content and form be both free of error and defect. For judging the validity of the form of any argument, the Aristotelian or formal logic came into existence. The function of formal logic is to determine the accuracy or inaccuracy of the form of an argument, and help the mind to avoid errors in the process of reasoning.

But the major problem that remains is that solely formal logic is inadequate for this purpose, because it cannot alone guarantee the validity

of an argument. It can give assurance about one aspect alone. To obtain the perfection of the material aspect, the use of material logic is also essential, that is, we .need certain criteria for controlling the quality of the rational material

Thinkers like Bacon and Descartes strove hard to evolve some kind of material logic similar to the formal logic of Aristotle, which was devised for formal reasoning. They did obtain certain criteria in this regard, though they are not as universal as those of Aristotelian logic, but are, to a limited extent, helpful in preventing the mind from committing errors in reasoning. Some may be surprised to know that the Qur'an has presented such principles for the prevention of any lapses in the process of reasoning, which surpass in merit and precedence the efforts of philosophers like .Descartes and others

The Qur'anic Viewpoint Regarding the Sources of Error

Among various sources of error mentioned by the Qur'an, one is that of taking conjecture and hypothesis for certainty and conviction. If a person were to adhere to the principle of putting conviction only in certainties and of not confusing between conjectures and certainties, he would not fall into error. The Qur'an lays great emphasis on this problem, and has clearly stated in one place that one of the biggest errors of the human mind is pursuit of conjectures and hypotheses. In another verse, :which is addressed to the Prophet (S), the Qur'an says

وَإِنْ تُطِعْ أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِى الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ

هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ

If thou obeyest the most part of those on earth, they will lead thee astray from the" (path of God: they follow only surmise, merely conjecturing. "(۶:۱۱۶

:In another verse, the Qur'an says

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

(And pursue not that thou has no knowledge of ... "(۱۷:۳۶"

This is the word of caution to mankind extended by the Qur'an, for the first time in the .history of human ideas, warning mankind against this kind of error

The second source of error in the reasoning process, which is particularly relevant in social issues, is imitation. Most people are such that they accept whatever beliefs that are current in their society. They adopt certain beliefs merely for the reason that they were followed by their preceding generation. The Qur'an bids people to carefully scrutinize all ideas and judge them by the criteria of reason --neither to follow blindly the conventional beliefs and traditions of their ancestors, nor to reject them totally .without any rational justification

It reminds us that there are many false doctrines that were introduced in the past, but were accepted by the people, and there are also certain truths that were presented in the distant past, but people resisted them on account of their ignorance. In accepting any ideas or principles, men are advised to make use of their intellects and rational faculties, and not to indulge in blind imitation. Very often, the Qur'an puts imitation of :ancestors in direct opposition to reason and intellect

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا

مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا ۗ أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

And when it is said to them: 'Follow what God has sent down', they say, 'No; but we" will follow such things as we found our fathers doing.' What? Even if their fathers had (no understanding of anything, and if they were not guided ?" (۲:۱۷۰

The Qur'an constantly reiterates the view that the idea of antiquity of an idea is neither the evidence of its falsity, nor is it a testimony of its truthfulness. Antiquity affects material objects; but the eternal truths of existence never become old and :outmoded. Truths like

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

(God changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves ..." (۱۳:۱۱"

are true for ever and ever. The Qur'an asks us to face issues with the weapon of reason and intellect. One should neither forsake a belief for fear of becoming the target of others' ridicule and banter, nor should he accept a belief just because it is upheld by some important and well- known persons. We should ourselves study and .investigate the roots of all matters and draw our own conclusions

:A Third effective source of error pointed out by the Qur'an is

,Selfish motives tarnish virtue and merit

.A cascade of curtains gallops from the heart towards vision

Unless one maintains objectivity and neutrality in every matter, he is unlikely to think correctly. Reason can function properly only

in an atmosphere that is free of selfish desires and motives. A well-known anecdote of al-Allamah al-Hilli, can illustrate this point.

A problem of fiqh was put before al-Allamah al-Hilli: If an animal falls inside a well, and the carcass cannot be removed; what should be done with the well? Incidentally, during the same days, an animal happened to fall into the well in his own house, and it became inevitable for him to deduce an injunction to solve his own problem, too.

There were two possible ways to solve the issue: Firstly, the well should be totally closed, not to be used again; secondly, a fixed quantity of water should be emptied from the well and the rest water of well would be clean and usable. The 'Allamah realized that he could not give a completely impartial verdict about the problem without interference from his own personal interest. Accordingly, he ordered his own well be closed. Then, with an easy mind, free of the pressure of selfish motives. he turned to deducing the details of verdict in the second case.

The Qur'an contains a large number of warnings regarding the evil of submission to personal desires. The following is just one instance of it:

إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ

"They follow nothing except conjecture, and what the self desires ... "(۵۳:۲۳)

Qur'anic Outlook Regarding the "Heart"

point

Perhaps I need not explain here that in the language of literature and mysticism the term heart does not mean the organ situated in the left side of the

human body, which pumps blood into the blood vessels. What is implied is the sublime and distinguishing faculty of the human soul, as can be readily understood from the following examples from the Qur'an and verses of Sa'di:

إِنَّ فِی ذَٰلِکَ لَذِکْرَیٰ لِمَنْ کَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ

(Surely in that there is a reminder to him who has a heart …” (۵۰:۳۷“

My heart was alarmed

,[on sensing the coming danger]

,While I, a thoughtless dervish

Do not know what

.this wandering prey has come across

These two examples make it obvious that the connoted meaning of the heart is quite different from the bodily organ. Elsewhere, the Qur'an refers to the ailments of the heart:

فِی قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا

(In their hearts is a sickness, and God has increased that sickness …” (۲:۱۰“

To cure this sickness is beyond the powers of any man of medicine, even the heart specialist; only the doctors of the spirit can diagnose such diseases and suggest proper remedies.

Definition of the Heart

What is the definition of this heart then? An answer to this question is to be sought in the reality of human existence. Every human being, although he is a single individual, possesses myriads of existential dimensions. The human “self” encompasses myriads of thoughts, desires, fears, hopes and inclinations. Like the ocean which links all rivers with one another, all these components of the human personality are related to the

.same center, which unites them with one another

The “self” itself is the deep and unfathomable ocean, whose depths no one can claim to

p: ۵۳

have charted out and to have discovered all its mysteries. Philosophers mystics, and psychologists --each of them has tried in his own specific way to explore its depths, .and has succeeded only to a certain degree in discovering its secrets

Perhaps the mystics, a bit more than others, have been successful in this regard. What the Qur'an refers to as the heart, is the reality of that ocean, which includes all that we name as the manifestations of the soul, to which all its rivers and tributaries .are connected. Even reason is one of the various rivers associated with this sea

In places where the Qur'an speaks of revelation, it does not make any mention of reason; rather it is merely concerned with the heart of the Prophet (S). This does not mean an absence of rational and demonstrative reception of the Holy Qur'an on the part of the Prophet, but it was his heart which, in a state that we cannot imagine, obtained the direct experience and awareness of those transcendental realities. The verses of Suurat al-Najm and Suurat al-Takwir describe the state of this union to :some extent

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ

Nor speaks he out of caprice. This is naught but a revelation revealed taught him by one terrible in

power, very strong; he stood poised, being on the higher horizon, then drew near and approached nearer, two bow's length away, or nearer, then revealed to His servant (that He revealed. His heart lies not of what he saw. (۵۳:۳-۱۱

The Qur'an mentions all these things to show that these matters are basically beyond .the range of rational understanding

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ () ذِی قُوَّهٍ عِنْدَ ذِی الْعَرْشِ مَکِینٍ مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِینٍ وَمَا صَاحِبُکُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِینِ

Truly this is the word of a noble messenger having power, of honoured place with the " Lord of the Throne, obeyed, moreover trusty. Your companion is not possessed; he (truly saw him on the clear horizon; he is not niggardly of the Unseen." (۸۱:۱۹-۲۳

Muhammad Iqbal offers a fine interpretation of this subject. He says that the prophet is one who, at first, imbibes the entire truth, and later on, in order to enrich the world and to alter the course of history, communicates everything that has reached him by .the way of Revelation

Wherever the Qur'an speaks of the revelation and the heart, al- though its import transcends the limits of reason and thought, its speech is not irrational or anti-rational. It expounds a vision which surpasses human reason and sensibility, and .enters a domain which is, basically, beyond reason and intellect

Characteristics of the Heart

The Qur'an regards the heart, also, as an instrument of understanding. In fact, the greater part of the Qur'anic message is addressed to the human heart --a message which is

audible to the ears of the heart alone, and is inscrutable to other receptive faculties. Accordingly, it attaches great importance to the care, protection, and development of this instrument. In the Qur'an, we recurrently come across such notions as purification of the self, purity and enlightenment of the heart, and purification of the :heart

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا

(Prosperous is he who purifies it [the self]." (٩١:٩"

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

(No indeed; but that they were earning has overwhelmed their hearts. "(٨٣:١۴"

:And about the salvation and enlightening of the heart, the Qur'an says

إِنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا

(If you fear God, He will assign you [the capacity of] distinguishing ..."(٨:٢٩"

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

But those who struggle in Our [cause], surely We shall guide them in Our ways..." ("(٢٩:۶٩

Contrarily, the Qur'an recurrently reminds that indecencies infect and darken the human soul, and deprive the human heart of sublime inclinations and virtuous :tendencies. At one place, speaking on behalf of the believers, it says

رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا

(Our Lord, make not our hearts to swerve after Thou hast guided us ..." (٣:٨"

:Describing the qualities of the evildoers, the Qur'an says

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

(No indeed; but that they were earning has overwhelmed their hearts. "(٨٣:١۴"

:The darkness of sin and injustice has engulfed their hearts

فَلَمَّا زَاغُوا أَزَاغَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ

(When they swerved, God caused their hearts to swerve … "(۶۱:۵"

:About the sealing and hardening of the hearts, it says

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ

سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ

God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a“ (covering … “(۲:۷

:And also

وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ

(We lay veils upon their hearts lest they understand it ..”. (۶:۲۵“

كَذَٰلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ الْكَافِرِينَ

(So does God seal the hearts of the unbelievers.” (۷:۱۰۱“

فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ

(So that their hearts have become hard, and many of them are ungodly.” (۵۷:۱۶“

All these verses point to the fact that the Qur'an recommends a sublime, spiritual atmosphere for mankind, and deems it necessary for every individual to strive to keep it clean and unpolluted. In addition, since an unsound social atmosphere renders fruitless the efforts of most individuals to keep pure and wholesome, the Qur'an recommends that the people should employ all their endeavour in the direction of .purification of their social atmosphere

The Qur'an unequivocally propounds the view that the continued existence of all those sublime values, beliefs and ideas, and continued social receptivity to all its moral advice and counsels, depend upon individual and collective struggle to eradicate all .types of meanness, sensuality, and lewdness

Human history itself is a witness to the fact that whenever despotic regimes have wanted to bring other societies under their autocratic rule, they have tried to corrupt their social spirit and pollute their social atmosphere. They provided enormous facilities for the people to indulge in licentiousness, and gave them every kind of freedom in this regard. A heart-rending account of this unholy treatment

meted out to Muslims of Spain --a region which is regarded to have played an effective role in initiating the Renaissance, and had the most advanced culture in .Europe-- throws enough light on this phenomenon

In order to divest Spain out of Muslims' hands, the Christians resorted to defilement of the morals of Muslim youth, by providing ample facilities for their debaucheries. They even went to the extent of alluring and enticing the army generals and government officials in topmost ranks. They thus succeeded in diverting Muslims from the path of determination and purpose, and in divesting them of their power, their strength of faith, and purity of soul, converting them into profligate weaklings addicted to drinking .and licentiousness

It is obvious that it is not very difficult to subdue such individuals. Christians took revenge on nearly eight hundred years of Muslim rule in such a way that history is ashamed at recounting those deeds. The same Christians who, according to the teachings of Jesus Christ ("offer your left cheek if your right cheek is slapped"), were supposed to behave in a different way, surpassed the bloodthirsty tradition of Genghiz Khan by the massacre of Muslims in Spain. Nevertheless, the ruin that Muslims suffered was the result of their own spiritual degeneration and decay; it was .their punishment for abandoning the Qur'anic commands

In our times, also, wherever the evil of colonialism exists, the same practices are vigorously adopted --a danger against which the Qur'an so emphatically warns us. The colonialists

try to corrupt the hearts; when the heart is thus debilitated, reason, too, is not only .lost and fails to function properly, but is itself turned into a terrible bondage

The colonialists and the exploitive powers are not afraid of establishing schools and universities: they even advocate popular education; but, on the other hand, they take good care to make arrangements to corrupt and destroy the spirit of students, and of the teachers as well. They are fully aware of the fact that an unhealthy mind and a sickly soul cannot make any decisive move, and readily yield to every type of .exploitation and degradation

That is why the Qur'an gives ample importance to the idea of exaltation, edification, :and purity of the soul of society. In one of its verses, it says

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ

And help one another to piety and God-fearing, do not help each other to sin and" (enmity... "(۵:۲

Men are, firstly, enjoined to pursue piety and are warned against sinning; secondly, .they are asked to perform righteous deeds collectively, not individually

Here I shall mention two or three sayings of the Prophet (S) and the Imams (A) in order to elucidate this point. There is a tradition that once a person came in the presence of the Prophet (S) and told him that he wished to ask certain questions. The Prophet asked him whether he wanted to listen to the answers, or if he wished to ask questions first. He asked the Prophet

S) to give the answers. The Prophet (S) told him that his question was concerned with) the meaning of virtue and goodness. The man affirmed that he intended to ask .exactly the same question

The Prophet gently knocked the man's chest with his three fingers, saying: “Put this question to your own heart;” then he added: “This heart is so made that it is harmonious with virtue; it is put at ease by virtue and piety, but disturbed by vice and villainy. In the same way, as presence of an alien disharmonious object in the human body causes uneasiness and discomfort, and disturbs its order, the human soul is thrown off its balance and ease on account of faulty behaviour.” What is commonly called the pain and torment of the conscience, is the same state of inconformity and :alienation of the soul

For an honest insight] ask your own heart, though the masters may have their own] .(different) opinion

The Prophet (S) points out the fact that if a person endeavours to seek reality and truth with an open and impartial mind, his heart can never deceive him in this regard; it will always guide him towards the straight path. Basically, as long as man is in search of truth and reality, and treads the path of truth, whatever he encounters in this course is nothing but truth. This is, of course, a very delicate point which is often .misunderstood

When someone falls into misguidance and loses his path, it is because

he was following a certain direction which was not determined by sincere search of truth. Answering someone who had asked the Prophet, “What is virtue?,” he said, “If you really want to know what is virtue, then understand that when your heart is serene and your conscience at rest, whatever has caused them to be such, is virtue. But when you are attracted towards something, and that does not bring peace and serenity to your heart, then you should know that it is vice and sin.”

Elsewhere, when the Prophet (S) was asked about the meaning of faith (iman), he said, “When one performs an ugly deed, and is overwhelmed with the feeling of reproach and displeasure, and when one performs virtuous deeds and feels happy and joyous, it means that he is endowed with faith.”

It has been quoted from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A) that when a believer liberates himself from all worldly bondages, he feels the delight of nearness to God within his heart; in this state, the whole world appears to him very small and insignificant; he strives with all power to liberate himself from the bondages of the material world. This is a reality attested by the lives of the men of God.

In the biographies of the Prophet (S), it is written that once after his morning prayers the Prophet (S) went to visit the Ashab al-Suffah. They were a group of poor men who did not possess any worldly belongings, and used to live by the side

of Prophet's Mosque in al-Madinah. When the Prophet (S) happened to see one of them, Harith ibn Zayd, who looked rather pale and emaciated, his eyes sunk deep inside his skull, he inquired, "How are you." He answered, "I have woken up a man of .certain faith." The Prophet asked him what proved his claim

He answered, "I am bereft of sleep at nights and engage in fasting during the days." The Prophet told him that this was insufficient. "Tell me more about it," he said. Harith said, "O Messenger of God, my condition is such that I can clearly see and hear the people of heaven and those of hell. If you permit me, I will inform you about the secret thoughts and inner states of every one of your companions." The Prophet bade him hold his tongue, and say no more; but asked him, "What is your desire?" He said, ".“To fight in the way of God

According to the Qur'an, furbishing of the human heart exalts a human being to such a point that, in the words of Ali (A), even if the veils that conceal the Unseen be removed from in front of him, there is nothing that can enhance his faith. The teachings of the Qur'an are meant to educate man to become a being equipped with the power of knowledge and reason on the one hand, and possessed of a pure heart and sound feeling on the other. They aim to train a human being

who is able to employ his reason and heart in the most proper and exalted fashion. .The Imams (S) and their true pupils were examples of such human beings

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ٩

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ٢٠٠٧, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

:Our Goals are

(propagating the culture and teachings of Thaqalayn (Quran and Ahlulbayt p.b.u.t-

encouraging the populace particularly the youth in investigating the religious issues-

replacing useful contents with useless ones in the cellphones, tablets and computers-

providing services for seminary and university researchers-

spreading culture study in the publich-

paving the way for the publications and authors to digitize their works-

:Policies

acting according to the legal licenses-

relationship with similar centers-

avoiding parallel working-

merely presenting scientific contents-

mentioning the sources-

.It's obvious that all the responsibilities are due to the author

:Other activities of the institute

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Holding virtual educational courses for the public-

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Producing thousands of research software in three languages (Persian, Arabic and-English) which can be performed in computers, tablets and cellphones and available and downloadable with eight international formats: JAVA, ANDROID, EPUB, CHM, PDF, HTML, CHM, GHB on the website

Also producing four markets named "Ghaemiyeh Book Market" with Android, IOS,-WINDOWS PHONE and WINDOWS editions

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